

Editorial

The contemporary political scene is criss-crossed by systems of willed ignorance, the most obvious example being in the field of economics. The opening articles in this issue point to other areas where those in power - both in the UK and internationally - have turned their faces away from unpalatable reality. Julia Buxton describes how drugs policy remains impervious to research, continuing to focus on imprisoning minor players and importing conflict into drug-growing regions, while failing to address issues that lead problem users into addiction. Göran Therborn shows how inequality has its own killing fields - another social fact rarely acknowledged by those in power. And Jane Wills points to the ways in which multinational companies are able to abdicate from responsibility for their workers through systems of subcontracted employment: the system allows them to wash their hands of the consequent low wages paid out to the workforce, which are often below subsistence levels. Terry Wrigley, in his discussion of academies, discusses yet another area in which privatisation - which one would by now think to be well past its sell-by date as a policy option - is still seen as a viable means of running a public service (and Terry's article evidences some of the denials and fiddling of statistics that are required to maintain the fiction). The current distribution of power relies to a damaging extent on the powerful refusing to know the consequences of their actions.

Tim Dartington explores a different aspect of contemporary policy madness - the idea that health and welfare systems can be run on the basis of a repudiation of dependency. As Tim argues, this is closely connected to current concepts of the individual, and relationships between them: even in the public sphere relationships are reduced to transactional encounters between customers and suppliers. This is the context within which, for example, CBT can be offered as quick fix to all sorts of deeply embedded social problems. A concept of the individual imported from the world of commerce is driving out of the system any idea that people need looking after and kindness.

Guy Brown and Sarah Radcliffe discuss the unforeseen consequences of increasing lifespans, in that more people are now experiencing long periods of extremely poor health in the years before death. They put forward a number of ways of improving this situation, and these fit neatly alongside Hilary Cottam's discussion

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of Participle, a group working with older people in London. Participle is aiming to contribute to a major rethink of public services, based on a set of principles they call Beveridge 4.0. At the heart of this model is the notion that people want to be socially connected: this includes the idea that people want to contribute to their own well-being, but there is also a recognition of dependency. The suggestion is that social relationships are the key to renewing public services.

Elsewhere in the issue alternatives are discussed to current ways of thinking about our future food security; and Karel Williams shows how time frames and a sense of changing paradigms affect our understanding of the economy. Ben Little and Bryan Gould, in very different ways, reflect on our political future, while the reviews section focuses on an engagement with recent political interventions.